



Harvard Charter Study Misleads: Demographic Comparisons and Conclusions Miss the Mark

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Another misleading report has been issued concerning charter schools, this one from the Harvard University Civil Rights Project. It concludes from an aggregated look at 2000-2001 national statistics, from the National Center for Education Statistics, that charters are more segregated than non-charter public schools. It uses data from 16 states that at the time, had enrollments totaling more than 95 percent of the charter population. And of course, the devil is always in the details:

- The report does not make comparisons of comparable schools or districts.

When we take into account the location of schools and the populations they represent, the picture is much brighter according to a wide variety of sources. Data from research institutions such as the Fordham Foundation, the Fourth Year Report on the State of Charter Schools from the U.S. Dept. of Education, and a myriad of other studies and Center for Education Reform's own data suggest that charters indeed do have disproportionate numbers of minority students. But it's almost always a better ratio among races than traditional public schools. Districts with huge minority populations would obviously have more minorities in charter schools. The question is not how many children are black or white in those charters, but how the composition compares to that of like schools.

- The report ignores the fact that charter school enrollment is voluntary, whereas in most school districts, students are assigned based on housing patterns.

By making comparisons of racial composition in the way they choose, the researchers ignore the other factors involved in school assignments and the geographic concentration of charter schools in areas like Chicago, Newark, Kansas City and Washington, DC. Charter schools have liberated minority parents in these districts from having to accept only the assignment made by district zoning officials.

- By focusing only on race, the researchers ignore the central purpose of charter schools: to provide opportunities for quality choices and accountability to people that do not have access to any such choices.

With that in mind, it is clear why minorities are over-represented in charter schools. That is a benefit, not a problem.

- Opportunities for integration are not only more prevalent within the charter school community, but people enter into charter schools willingly and in direct rejection of the schools to which they were assigned.

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